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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S 3-IN-1 ELECTIONS, U.S.-
TAIWAN RELATIONS

1. Summary: Major Taiwan dailies gave significant reporting and editorial coverage December 3-5 to Taiwan's 3-in-1 local elections Saturday, in which the KMT won a landslide victory, and the impact of the elections on the future prospects of the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps. The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a banner headline on its front page December 5 that read: "Bian's Approval Rating Drops to a New Low of 21." The sub-headline added: "[DPP's] Defeat Is Mainly Due to Its Poor Administrative Performance and Party Image Tarnished by the Kaohsiung Mass Rapid Transit Corp. Scandals. 56 Percent [of the Respondents] Believe Chen Shui-bian Should Be the Key Person Held Responsible [for DPP's Setback]." The centrist "China Times" also carried a poll survey on its page two December 5 edition that said: "45 Percent [of Those Polled] Believe Chen Should Be Held Responsible for the DPP's Defeat."

Most papers carried the State Department's statement Saturday that the "3-in-1" elections reflected Taiwan's democratic strength and vitality. The centrist "China Times" also carried a news story December 5 saying that due to the KMT's landslide victory and KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's soaring popularity, Washington has invited Ma to visit the United States after the 3-in-1 elections.

2. Almost all newspapers editorialized on the 3-in-1 election results and the future prospects for President Chen Shui-bian and KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou. Editorials of the pro-independence "Liberty Times," "Taipei Times," (English-language) and "Taiwan News" (English-language) all agreed that the DPP's setback is a stern warning to the ruling party. An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" analyzed the election results and said they will have a profound impact on President Chen Shui-bian and the DPP. A "China Times" editorial said the voters have used their votes to send a clear message to both the ruling and opposition parties, namely, no political party can be the ruling party forever. A commentary in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said President Chen has himself defeated the DPP and that he will not change his policy lines during the remaining two years. A commentary in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" urged the Chen Shui-bian administration to reinforce its ties with the United States. End summary.

1. Taiwan's 3-in-1 Elections

A) "Can the Blow of Saturday's Elections Wake up the DPP?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] commented in an editorial (12/4):

"The 3-in-1 local elections were over Saturday, with the KMT winning 14 mayoral and magistrate posts, defeating the six slots collected by the DPP. DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang offered to resign to take responsibility for the DPP's defeat. The DPP's setback in Saturday's elections was not merely a problem of the party's mobilization, nomination or campaign strategies. Rather, it is because the voters have lost faith in the DPP government, a lesson worth pondering for the DPP people. .

"The DPP's defeat in Saturday's elections demonstrated that Taiwan's voters are capable of reflection, and they will not endorse a government that has violated its [pledge of adopting] a route to Taiwan nativism. If the DPP fails to carry out its commitment to reform, nativism, and stemming corruption, the applause it won in the past will become catcalls. The voters have cast a vote of no confidence in the DPP government now. What is left to see is whether the DPP is a party capable of self-examination and can regain the mainstream public's confidence in its power to safeguard Taiwan."

B) "The DPP Receives a Stern Warning"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (12/4):

". Commentators have argued that the outcome of these

elections would be a good indication of the strength of [KMT Chairman] Ma's leadership. And now that the KMT has performed very well, it is widely believed that the internal rifts and turmoil that were generated by the KMT chairmanship race may subside for the moment.

"It seems that the era of Ma Ying-jeou has officially started. The DPP had better start preparing itself for some tough challenges ahead. Finding out where it has gone wrong in recent years is the first step to meeting those challenges."

C) "All Sides Must Heed Voters' Message"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (12/5):

". This result [of Saturday's elections] undoubtedly inflicted a grave setback to President Shui-bian and the DPP by demonstrating a severe lack of . trust on the part of the majority of the public in the DPP government. KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou emerged as the sole major winner in the campaign. Through this triumph, the Taipei City mayor consolidated his new leadership within the pan-blue camp and has also become the most popular political heavyweight in Taiwan politics. These facts are clearly favorable to his expected bid for the presidency in March 2008. .

"In sum, the results of Saturday's poll showed a public eagerness for a cleaner government, more political stability, continued economic improvement, better and more efficient governance, and well-established rule of law and political institutions. By taking the theme of strength and unity, and applying it to healthy political competition, anti-corruption, economic rejuvenation, fighting crime and improving the welfare of the people, the DPP administration may be able to win back support from the rank and file."

D) "Ma Gets Stronger; Bian Got Deflated; and Voters Are the Winners"

An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 550,000] wrote (12/4):

"The KMT landslide victory: `Ma [Ying-jeou] gets stronger; [Chen Shui-]Bian gets deflated; and it's over for [James] Soong..

"The results of Saturday's elections have profound consequences. Chen Shui-bian has become a lame duck both within and outside the DPP; neither Washington nor Beijing pay any attention to him, and both will wait until a new president is elected in Taiwan in 2008. The pan-Blue legislators' morale was highly boosted; they now think they have a strong reason to block [some of] the bills and will definitely act tougher. Taiwan is doomed to waste its time in internal struggles for the next two years. In comparison to the unprecedented solidarity of the pan-Blue alliance surrounding Ma Ying-jeou, the DPP will face intense internal struggles or will even split. Chen Shui-bian's prestige and authority will be jeopardized and, should he fail to coordinate [among the various DPP factions], the DPP will likely suffer a severe defeat in the presidential election slated for 2008. ."

E) "Taiwan People Give Their Answer Using Their Votes!"

The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] noted in an editorial (12/4):

"The Central Election Commission announced the final results of the [3-in-1] elections Saturday. The announcement is akin to a formal declaration that the 3-in-1 elections have again redrawn the political map of Taiwan. The KMT has successfully crossed [and expanded its power to over] the Cho Shui River [that runs across central Taiwan], while the DPP lost several of its traditional strongholds and retreated to the six cities and counties in southern Taiwan. Taiwan voters have used their votes to send a clear message to both the ruling and opposition parties: no party can be the ruling party forever!."

F) "President Chen Defeats His DPP"

Joe Hung said in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (12/5):

"President Chen Shui-bian, who ended the half-century one-party rule of the Kuomintang in Taiwan in 2000, defeated his own Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in what is known as the `three-in-one' election of local governments on Saturday. The opposition Kuomintang won big, but its landslide victory was a vote of no confidence handed to the president by the voters, who five years ago they had found an incomparable leader but now feel they have been cheated. .

"The most urgent task facing the defeated president is to safeguard the stability of his government in the face of a triumphant opposition.. No matter how the administration is reshuffled, the president, who in fact is his own premier, will not change his policy lines. The impasse between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait will remain, if it does not get worse - Chen vowed in the last days of the campaign to make it worse, should the opposition win - until he bows out in May 2008. Nothing will be done to improve relations with China, an emerging economic power, on which Taiwan depends increasingly heavily for trade and growth. ."

12. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

"U.S.-Taiwan Relations Need to Be Reinforced"

Liu Kuan-teh, a Taipei-based political commentator, said in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (12/3):

"While domestic attention has again been focused on local politics and elections rather than international affairs, a closer look at the recent triangular goings on between Washington, Taipei and Beijing reveals an urgent need for President Chen Shui-bian's administration to reinforce its ties with the US. .

"There is no doubt that the US and Taiwan share the universal values of democracy, freedom and human rights. But when it comes to the question of how to strike a balance between the growth of Taiwan's democratic consciousness and Washington's attempts to build a 'candid, constructive and cooperative' partnership with China, it seems only the national interests of the US prevail. Even the 'alliance of values' between Washington and Taipei can sometimes become distorted.. Therefore, Bush's recent statement [in Kyoto] presents a window of opportunity for the government to consolidate a sustainable partnership with the US.

"The lack of intimate interaction between Bush and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, displays a delicate change of Beijing's perception of the Bush administration. While intentionally refusing to engage in talks with Chen, Beijing's leaders have also shown less willingness to cooperate with Washington. One should not overlook the possible change of Chinese mindset as Beijing probably has its eyes on the next change of leadership in both Taiwan and the US. Until 2008, passive interaction with Taiwan and the US may become a central principle of Beijing's policy..

"Under such a geopolitical landscape, the Bush administration should really contemplate the degree to which Washington can keep a balance between safeguarding its own national interests and dealing with an undemocratic China while keeping a fully-fledged democratic Taiwan safe from China's military expansion."

KEEGAN